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ABSTRACT

In October 1994, the Organization of American Historians (OAH) conducted a survey of community college history faculty to develop a coherent description of the historians and their institutions, history programs at community colleges, and faculty responsibilities. Completed surveys were received from 512 faculty members representing 264 institutions, or approximately 18% of the nation's 1,469 community colleges. An analysis of responses indicated the following: (1) 48% of the respondents had doctoral degrees, while 46% listed master's degrees as their highest earned degree; (2) the 10 most frequently selected major areas of interest were the Civil War, social history, politics, colonial and revolutionary period, foreign relations, state and local history, cultural history, military, women, and intellectual history; (3) 44% had taught at their present institution for 20 or more years, while 22.7% had taught there less than 5 years; (4) 77.5% were tenured, 12.8% were on the tenure track, and only 9.7% held part-time, temporary positions; (5) only 35% reported that their college had a separate history department, over 71% taught in departments or subdepartments with 5 or fewer historians, and the average number of history sections offered at the colleges was 30; (6) most specified individual research grants as the most desirable professional development opportunity; (7) positive aspects of teaching history at a community college included lack of pressure to publish, consistent and close interaction with students, and working with talented dedicated colleagues; and (8) problems identified included the poor preparation and attitudes of their students, heavy workloads and enrollment, and the lowering of academic standards. (K

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HISTORY IN THE 1990'S: THE STATUS OF THE PROFESSION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Most Americans who take college-level History courses take them at a community college. Nevertheless, we hear relatively little formal discussion outside of the community colleges about the teaching of history in those institutions. It sometimes seems as though the community colleges exist in a world wholly separated from the rest of higher education. Likewise, relatively few community college historians have been active in the two major national professional historians' organizations, the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Organization of American Historians (OAH). In the past, neither organization devoted much attention to the teaching of history in the community colleges. But that situation has changed. In recent years, both the AHA and the OAH have been extending their efforts to improve history education at all levels to the nation's expansive network of community colleges.

In early 1994, the OAH appointed an *ad hoc* task force on community colleges. The group was comprised of community college and university faculty from around the country. In addition to my colleague, Nadine Hata, who chairs the task force, and myself, we benefitted from the efforts of Elizabeth A. Kessel (Ann Arundel Community College), John M. McLeod (Miami-Dade), George Stevens (Duchess Community College), Myron Marty (Drake University), and Lawrence W. Levine (George Mason University). The task force set several preliminary goals, the first of which was to gather as much information as possible on the

present composition of the community college professorate.

In October, 1994, the task force sent out an ambitious survey to community college historians across the nation. It asked for responses that would provide a coherent description of the community college historian and her/his institutions, programs, and responsibilities. The survey also attempted to find out what community college historians liked about their professional lives, and what particular problems they faced, hoping that the OAH might be able to help in solving some of the latter. The response was gratifying. By early January, we had received completed surveys from 512 faculty representing 264 institutions, or about 18 percent of the 1,469 community colleges in the United States. The regional distribution of the sample was excellent: we received responses from 46 states and one territory (American Samoa). Some of the respondents teach in very large multi-college systems, while others teach in small and intimate single-campus settings.

Structure of the Survey/Faculty Academic Preparation

The first three pages of the survey elicited information on faculty professional background and career paths, areas of interest, institutional factors, teaching loads and conditions, professional service, scholarly work, and professional development. Forty-three percent of all respondents hold Ph.D.'s, with another 5.2 percent holding DA's or Ed.D.'s (48.2 percent total doctorate-holding). Very few (only 1.8 percent) characterized their educational status as "ABD." The largest single cohort, 46 percent, listed the MA as their highest earned degree. A closer look at the first 78 responses revealed that, of the 39 Ph.D.'s among them, 30 (77 percent) were granted by major research universities (those categorized as such by the

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). Although we still need to correlate degree status with length of teaching service, my impression is that those faculty hired within the past decade are much more likely to have earned Ph.D.'s than are those of the "founding" generation of community college faculty, those recruited from high school teaching in the 1960's and early 1970's.

Historical Interests

The ten most frequently selected major areas of interest were: Civil War and Reconstruction, Social History, Politics, Colonial and Revolutionary Period, Foreign Relations, State and Local History, Cultural History, Military, Women, and, Intellectual. For purposes of comparison, the top ten areas of interest listed by the entire OAH membership on the last membership renewal form were: Social History, Politics, Cultural History, Women, Colonial and Revolutionary, Civil War and Reconstruction, Foreign Relations, Intellectual, African American, and, Early National Period. Although the two lists share eight topical areas, the community college historians include Military and State and Local History among their specialties, while African American and Early National Period, topics 9 and 10 respectively on the membership list, were chosen by far smaller numbers of community college historians.

Teaching Experience/Length of Service

When asked how many years they had taught at their present institution, 44.2 percent reported 20 years or more, while 22.7 percent answered that they had taught there less than 5 years. The polarized distribution of those responses suggests a generation gap among community college historians, a probability supported by the written comments made by many. Regarding security of employment, 77.5 percent of the faculty surveyed are tenured, 12.8

percent were on the tenure track, while only 9.7 percent held part-time, temporary positions. One alarming statistic, at least to me, is that 14.1 percent of our respondents teach in systems that do not grant or recognize tenure.

Academic Rank/Department Structure

A majority (58.5 percent) of community college historians who replied to our queries teach in institutions that have academic rank, and most are members of interdisciplinary departments: only 35 percent reported that their college had a History Department as a separate unit. Department size tended to be small, regardless of the size of the institution: over 71 percent teach in departments or subdepartments consisting of five or fewer tenured/tenure-track historians, another 13.1 percent of the departments have between 6 and 10 members, while 13.3 percent of our respondents teach in departments with no tenured or tenure-track historians. Similarly, most departments regularly employ five or fewer part-timers, while only 3.1 percent offer classes taught by 15 or more part-time faculty.

Departmental Offerings/Class Size/Teaching Load

The number of history sections offered by the community colleges in our sample seemed to average about 30. That number seemed to represent the average class size as well. Our respondents wrote that only 9.8 percent of the classes they teach enrol more than 40 students, while 13.4 percent had fewer than 20 on their rosters. The standard teaching load in the community colleges is 30 units, or ten classes, per year. Still, a bit fewer than one-half (48 percent) of our informants reported that they taught no more than 10 classes per (9- or 10-month) year. The majority taught more, with 6.5 percent reporting that they somehow taught more than 15 classes in a regular academic year (excluding summer).

Time Allocation

Community college historians, as indicated by those responding to our survey, spend most of their professional time teaching or in closely related activities. Most of our informants teach the introductory U.S. History survey, usually both halves. In fact, 43.6 percent teach nothing but the survey, while 79.3 percent devote less than 20 percent of their teaching time to more specialized courses. Most do not teach non-history classes, though a significant minority, roughly 38 percent, spend some of their time teaching outside the discipline of history, usually in related fields like political science. Forty-four percent of survey participants have two different teaching preparations; 33.9 percent have three. The majority, 66.7 percent, teach summer classes, 46.0 percent of those teaching two, while 23.5 percent teach three or more. The practice of teaching "overload" classes during the regular academic year seems to be common: nearly half (45.6 percent) of our respondents reported teaching additional classes, usually one per semester.

Non-Teaching Professional Activity

As for non-teaching professional activity, most of the historians in this survey reported some committee responsibilities and other kinds of college service. Relatively few spend more than 10 percent of their time in research and writing. Still, 49.6 percent reported that they had authored some work within the last five years, most often an article in a professional publication (55.7 percent), though 29.7 percent had published a book. More than half (55.8 percent) have presented papers at professional conferences, and 56.9 percent are engaged currently in research projects. Sources of support for research projects undertaken by community college historians are limited. Sixty percent of our respondents teach at institutions with regular paid sabbaticals;

but, most (57.9 percent) have not had any financial support for research since they completed their graduate education. One of the most recent surveys of the attitudes and activities of higher education faculty indicates that the community college historians responding to our survey are only slightly less engaged in research and scholarship than are most faculty in all colleges and universities. *The American College Teacher: National Norms for the 1989-90 H.E.R.I Faculty Survey*, published by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, reported that the largest cohort (27.9 percent) of the nearly 36,000 faculty they surveyed stated that they spent no more than 10 percent of their weekly professional time in research and writing. The average teaching load in all institutions is between 9 and 12 hours/week, compared to 15 for community college faculty. Only 55.7 percent of all college and university faculty published professional writing in the two years prior to the UCLA survey; the percentage of our community college informants publishing within the last 5 years was just under 50 percent.

Organizational Affiliation/Journal Readership

Roughly one quarter of the historians we surveyed belong to the OAH, with a similar percentage listing membership in the American Historical Association. Much smaller numbers belong to several community college organizations (like the Community College Humanities Association), while even smaller numbers belong to special interest organizations and state and local history societies. Most reported some regular journal reading: the *Journal of American History* (220), the *American Historical Review* (196), the OAH's *Magazine of History* (58), and the *History Teacher* (58) attracted the largest blocks of readers. Many also read regional, state , and local historical journals, like the *Journal of Southern History*, and *California History*. Several OAH Executive Board members expressed surprise when informed that our sample of

community college historians much preferred reading the scholarly journals to the teaching-oriented magazines. The data suggest that community college historians are most interested in remaining conversant with the latest scholarship, not in reading about pedagogical issues after 15 hours of teaching survey courses each week.

Desired Professional Development Opportunities

In selecting from among four kinds of professional development opportunities they might find most helpful (individual research grants, faculty seminars, master teacher seminars, and other), our respondents overwhelmingly identified individual research grants as first on their wish list. When asked to rank several kinds of services the OAH is considering offering to community college faculty, participants showed much interest in regional meetings of community college historians, and in the establishment of an "Information Clearinghouse" (including information on funding possibilities). There was moderate interest in a teaching alliance of university, college, and pre-collegiate historians, and in the production of a directory of community college historians. Very few people supported the suggestion that there be a regular community college column in the OAH Newsletter.

On the last two pages of the survey form, community college historians were asked to respond as expansively as they wished to two questions: (1) What are the most positive aspects of teaching history at a community college? (2) What are the most pressing problems/needs facing you as a community college history professor? They were also asked what they would like to tell the OAH leadership, and how the OAH could best assist them. There was a final space of several lines for "Additional comments or concerns."

Positive Aspects

The most positive aspects of teaching history at a community college, according to our informants, are the absence of pressure to do research and to publish, along with the fact that these institutions emphasize teaching above all other professional activities . Almost as frequently, respondents wrote that they enjoyed consistent interaction and close relations with students, and that through such contact they were able to encourage student success. Many felt the community college environment enables them to awaken an interest in history in those who either dislike it or are poorly prepared to understand it. Community college historians praised the diversity of their student populations, expressing a particular satisfaction in teaching "non-traditional" and returning students, and often noted the rewards for working with "talented, dedicated colleagues." One professor wrote that she loved teaching in the community colleges because they were the only "democratic, proletarian institutions of learning."

Problems

Survey participants identified three main problems related to student characteristics, professional conditions, and the academic culture of the community colleges. Many historians complained about the poor preparation and attitudes of their students. Several stressed that their ability to find a comfortable teaching style is complicated by the wide range of abilities they find among their students.

Far more problematic for most of our respondents are the conditions under which they work. Many argued that teaching loads are so heavy that they make scholarship nearly impossible and are counterproductive to truly effective teaching. Insufficient time and support for research, writing, and general professional development were cited often. In fact, a number

of faculty argued that community college administrators (and some senior faculty) see scholarship and teaching as being opposites rather than complements. In addition, many complained of the drudgery of teaching mainly survey courses and the lack of opportunity to teach electives. Several noted increasing administrative responsibilities, poor physical plants, and little or no secretarial support as other problems damaging their instructional effectiveness.

Last of all, many of our informants criticized the academic culture of the community colleges. They wrote of administrators insistent on high class enrolment minimums, increasing class sizes, and retention at any cost (including the lowering of academic standards). Many complained of the recent emphasis on models of "efficiency" and "productivity" that are ill-suited to educational enterprises. Additional difficulties mentioned were the over-reliance on part-time faculty, an anti-Ph.D. bias among some colleagues and administrators, a knee-jerk deference of many faculty to administrators, and, some administrative and faculty incompetence. A few of the younger faculty criticized what they saw as the racism and general prejudices of their seniors, while several older faculty bemoaned the imposition of "p.c." standards by their junior colleagues. Many complained of a general sense of isolation from the historical profession.

Indications

The results of the OAH Survey of Community College Historians indicate that there is a large body of our colleagues teaching in the community colleges whose training and interests are very similar to those historians teaching in four-year colleges and research universities. Many want to function more as historians without diminishing their commitment to teaching. Nevertheless, their positions are so teaching intensive that most feel they have insufficient time

and support for the kind of scholarship essential to teaching history at the college level. In addition, they feel marginalized within their profession and harassed by administrators (and some colleagues) who fail to recognize or endorse the connection between scholarship and teaching.

On the other hand, respondents expressed their sense of freedom from the rigors of publication expectations, and from an over-emphasis on traditional methods of evaluating their professional worth. Throughout the surveys, the comments indicated the community college faculty's appreciation for the difficulties facing their students, along with a celebration of the special joy of instructing those who, more because of social circumstances than for lack of ability, will never grace the campuses of this nation's elite universities and colleges. Community college historians are dedicated to teaching history to the most diverse and most poorly prepared student population in American higher education.

Recommendations to the OAH

What can the OAH do to integrate community college historians more fully into the profession? In the survey responses, several suggestions emerged as common: utilize the talents of community college historians; improve communication within the profession; recruit more community college faculty to deliver papers, serve on convention panels, and hold committee appointments; and, respect us. Based upon our analysis of the survey results, suggestions made in open meetings with community college historians in Washington, Anaheim, and Chicago, and our own experiences, the *Ad Hoc* Task Force on Community Colleges made the following recommendations to the Executive Board at the 1995 Washington conference: (1) Begin assembling a directory of community college historians, possibly as a joint effort with the AHA;

(2) Plan regional conferences for community college historians, possibly in collaboration with the Community College Humanities Association and/or the American Political Science Association; (3) Send the results of the survey to all those who responded and to others who wrote requesting information. Include a cover letter that solicits new membership, and that urges community college historians to submit papers and other proposals to OAH Program Committees; (4) Contact the Community College Trustees Association and the American Association of Community Colleges, informing them of the results of the survey and urging them to endorse the importance of scholarship to effective teaching. Explain how their institutions benefit from increased involvement of community college historians in the larger concerns of the profession; (5) recommend that the *Ad Hoc* Task Force pursue NEH funding for two projects: (A) A mentoring project aimed at improving undergraduate instruction, especially in the U.S. survey course; and, (B) A "School to Career" project that will involve humanities and vocational community college instructors in joint efforts to provide younger students with both workplace and academic skills.

Conclusion

Pleased as I am with the rich data we have accumulated, much remains to be done. Since virtually all community college funding is public, the rightward turn of the electorate presents us with a major problem. Political and business leaders today talk of the benefits of higher education in purely individual terms - as future income benefits that accrue only to those who matriculate. I hear little reference to the *social* benefits of higher education. Consequently, political leaders seem to believe that public support for an enterprise without real social consequence can and should be diminished. People who can afford to do so should pay more for

an education that is really only for their benefit anyway. The older principle that education is of value to society and thus deserves public support may be dying. The OAH must work in concert with other professional organizations, including faculty unions, to prevent further reductions in community college funding, to protect tenure at all levels of public education, and to restore the promise of opportunity once heralded as the primary mission of this nation's community colleges.